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ABSTRACT

This study examined the teaching style and methods of Ana, a kindergarten teacher in Portugal, chosen because she is considered a master teacher by colleagues and parents and because she grew up in Portugal before democracy. The study attempted to answer the questions: (1) What are the commitments and competencies that distinguish Ana as a master teacher? (2) How has Ana's practice been influenced by her personal and professional biography? (3) How does her biography affect the curriculum she constructs with her children? Extensive observations and in-depth interviews were conducted across a 16-month period. A picture of Ana emerged as a teacher who builds a participatory democracy in the classroom by teaching her children to be active members of a community of learners. A large table in the center of the classroom at which discussion, planning, and problem solving occur served as a metaphor for this effort. Her curriculum was interpreted as constructivist, polycentric, and tied to the larger social life rather than to the classroom. Ana's teaching was also seen to be created out of the multiplicity of her private and professional selves, at the core of which was her moral self with a view of children rooted less in developmental and sociological theories than in fundamental caring and respect. (Contains 21 references.) (EV)

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"HOUSES AND FIELDS AND VINEYARDS SHALL YET AGAIN BE BOUGHT IN THIS LAND": THE STORY OF ANA, A PUBLIC KINDERGARTEN TEACHER IN PORTUGAL

ED 400 928

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The study I talk about today was carried out in a kindergarten just outside Lisbon, Portugal, in a school I call Figueirinha. The study focused on Ana[1] , the teacher and the 3 to 5-year old children in her classroom. Shortly before my study began Figueirinha was devastated by a fire. The immediate surroundings as well as the larger landscape of Portuguese educational system were depressing. Ana´s classroom, however, was a very special place.

Across a 16-month period I observed in Ana´s classroom for prolonged periods and conducted in-depth interviews with her. A very large and detailed data record was constructed. The portrait of Ana in this study emerged from my long and close interaction with her.

I chose Ana for two reasons: First she is considered an excellent teacher, indeed, a master teacher, by colleagues, parents, and university supervisors; second, she, like me, is an experienced

[1] Ana is a long time member of a well known teachers´ movement in Portugal, the "Movimento da Escola Moderna" (Modern School Movement), It´s pedagogy was inspired in theory and practice of French Pedagogist Celestin Freinet.

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teacher who grew up before the revolution and remembers well Portugal before democracy -- "the days when we could not speak".

I briefly, too briefly, address two questions from the larger study: 1) What are the commitments and competences that distinguish Ana as a master teacher? 2) How has Ana's practice and curriculum been influenced by her personal and professional biography?

My research was informed by interpretive interactionist (Denzin, 1989) and feminist perspectives informed the research and the interpretation. My study contributes to a growing body of research that attempts to understand teaching by attending closely to the voices of teachers themselves and developing "a modality of research that speaks from within and to the researcher" (Goodson 1992, p. 15).

Four Scenes at the Large Table

I begin with four scenes from Figueirinha, all occurring at the "Large Table" , which dominates the center of the classroom. It is not a Round Table, like the one Arthur shared with his knights at Camelot. It is rectangular formed from three smaller tables pushed together. I would suggest that the spirit that inspired Arthur for joint decision making with his knights is the same that Ana creates around the Large Table.

Pedro

Ana is sitting around the Large Table with all the children. Pedro, a handicapped boy, who is unable to walk enters, carried by his

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father. "There is our Pedro," says Ana with a cheerful smile. While his father takes off Pedro´s coat and hat, Joana Raquel moves to make room for Pedro to sit next to Ana. Pedro´s face shows delight as he looks at his friends, who are so very fond of him. Pedro´s father stays awhile, watching the interaction at the Large Table. Ana puts her arm around Pedro´s shoulder and she continues the discussion. Every now and then, I can hear Pedro´s soft voice saying "I did..." or "I also...." Pedro, now, belongs to the Large Table group.

Cous-cous

Ana sits at the Table with the children. Hugo and mother Cidália, come in. They are a shy and beautiful black pair. This morning Cidália will make cous-cous with the children. Ana had been in Morocco and wanted to make cous-cous with the children. She discovered that Cidália knew how to make it, she invited her to come and show the children.

Senhor Paixão

Senhor Paixão enters in the classroom, hand in hand with his beloved grand daughter, Joana Raquel. He takes his cap off as he shakes hands with the teacher. For him schools are places where one should show respect, almost like churches. He is stepping onto sacred ground, Joana Raquel´s school. Vasco tells him that a little wooden toy is broken. Mr. Paixão takes him from Vasco. He will fix it when he returns home. Andreia wants to show him how the silk worms have grown. A small group of children gather around the old man at the Large Table as he talks about the cocoons, explaining how the worms are becoming older and harder -- soon they will become butterflies, who will then lay new eggs. Then, as he did the previous year, Mr.

Paixão will take the eggs home and keep then in the warmth of a closet, until the following spring when he will return them to the school.

The Turtle

I enter the classroom and see everyone sitting at the Large Table in silence. Ana tells me, with a very sad face, "The turtle is dead." I feel dismayed. All the little animals are part of life at Figueirinha. The turtle lies at the center of the table on a piece of white paper.
Vasco's mother arrives. They all tell her the news. The turtle is dead.
Ana tells me: "Fábio brought the turtle ".
Fabio who is sitting at my side asks "Is the turtle going to heaven?"
Then he answers himself, "First we make the funeral and then she goes to heaven."

I came to treasure my time at the Large Table watching the children and Ana discussing various issues. In the last vignette, the death of the turtle became a group issue that was brought figuratively and literally to the center of the Table. The dead turtle herself, occupied the center of the Table. Everybody -- children and adults -- were drawn into the event. Fabio tried to make sense of it.

The Large Table is the setting for discussion, negotiation, for decision making. It is the forum, the nucleus, where the life of the group is built. It is the symbol of the community of that classroom. The Large Table is a power center, an energy center.

On the wall is a "journal" on which Ana records classroom life across the year -- one of the "work organizers", I describe later. The

"news" she puts on the "wall journal" is first discussed and theby becomes a group issue at the Large Table.

The Large Table is the place for the morning meetings, at which Ana and the children plan the day. The Large Table is also the place where children chat and eat their snack together, often having large group conversations. And, of course, it is the place where birthdays are celebrated, with a cake, candles, and a gift made by the group. Finally it is the place where the teachers meet twice a week, after the children have left, to plan and evaluate their work. When I entered Figueirinha each morning, I always looked first toward the Large Table, because I knew there would be a place there for me and my lap top computer.

Ana´s goal is to provide a "schoolhome" (Martin, 1992) for her children, not a cozy "homey" place with decorations and plants, but a place that she and her children feel is their own. At the center of the home is the Large Table.

Let me turn briefly to the vignettes. Ana´s classroom had no special facilities or classroom aides for Pedro. Pedro had to be carried around the classroom. When he sat in a chair, Ana held him in by tying a large piece of cloth aound his chest. But Pedro´s parents had been unable to find a classroom for him and came to Ana. Ana made room for Pedro, in her classroom and at the Large Table. She spend much time preparing the other children to accept him, not by emphasizing his handicap but by presenting herself and the children with the challenge of preparing a classroom that Pedro would like -- "Let´s see if he likes our classroom".

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I saw Ana´s taking Pedro in as a gesture that shows what is at the heart of Ana´s being, as a person and as a teacher -- respect and caring, that ensured a sense of belonging for all her children. At Figueirinha, at the Large Table, there was a place for everyone. She made a place for Hugo´s mother, Cidália, a black woman who was very shy and could find no way herself to become part of the classroom. Ana finds ways to open the door to parents, not narrow doors, but avenues (as she said in an interview) for them to become part of the classroom, teachers themselves. They are accepted as people, important in themselves, not just because parental involvement is seen as useful for the children´s development.

Sr. Paixão, she not only brings him in, he becomes "one of the pillars of Figueirinha". The children know he is important to them. He becomes a surrogate grand father from the class. Senhor Paixão, one child informed me, "owns this school". Keeping the silk worm eggs year after year, he is a bearer of life at Figueirinha, a guaranteer of continuity. "For me, this is life", Sr. Paixão tells me. He sits at the Large Table and the children and Ana learn from him. Figuerinha became for him an important place, an alternative to staying home doing "what he should not" and feeling useless. Grandparents are important in Portuguese culture as caretakers and teachers of traditional culture.

Ana´s Moral Self

I came to see that Ana´s moral self is at the heart of Ana the professional and Ana the person, two dimensions I cannot possibly separate. Teaching is Ana´s identity, the organizing center of all her

other activities, her search for meaning in the world (Ayers, 1989), her life project (Greene, 1987), her moral act (Tom, 1984). Her moral self has been nurtured and constructed and reconstructed in the process of performing a profession that she still loves, after almost thirty years of practice!

This moral self has also been constructed through hardship and painful choices, for example, leaving an abusive alcoholic husband, through revealing epiphanies and experiences with injustice. Ana learned that life is full of moral and ethical dilemmas and that, at times, we need to choose the most difficult path. But Ana´s moral self has also been nurtured by positive childhood experiences, in her initial training as a preschool teacher, in her daily interaction with her daughter Maria, with her friends, and at the Movimento da Escola Moderna -- a well known teachers´ movement in Portugal, inspired by the theory and practice of French pedagogue Celestin Freinet.

Ana´s moral self is, finally, a gendered self, it is a woman´s self. Her passion for community and participation moves her into caring for relationships, nurturing life around her, creating beauty and aesthetics in her quotidian actions. As she nurtures classroom life with care and compassion, Ana makes the intellectual life of a group of children burst out in joy and fullness.

Ana´s teaching is like "a narrative-in-action . . . an expression of a biography and history" (Carter 1993, p. 8). Ana teaches with her whole being, from her moral self constructed throughout her personal and professional biographical path.

An Emergent Curriculum:
- Phenomenological
Constructive
- Social
- Intellectual
- Content Lines/Concerns:
. Aesthetics
. Culture
. Ecology
. Politics/Social Justice
. Ethics
- Openess to the Unexpected
Moral Self as the Core of Teaching:
- Respect and Compassion
- Enacting Democracy
- A Gendered Moral Self
- Rendering Herself Unnecessary
Ana´s Daily Changing Puzzle
- A Predictable Quotidian
- Work Organizers as Scaffolds
- Flexible time
- Evolving Space and Materials
- Caring for Interactions
- Fostering Productive Conflict
- Control "as needful" with a "light touch"
- Balancing Many Things at the Same Time
- Providing a "Schoolhome"
Towards a Theory of Ana´s Teaching
A View of the Child:
- Intelligent and Capable
- Member of a Group
- Inserted in Culture/Context
- Reliable and Independent
- Curious and Alert
- Natural Researcher
- Constructor of Knowledge with Others
- Capable of Empathy
Classroom Life as Democracy Building:
- A Participatory Democracy
- A Sense of Community
- Nurturing the Group´s Memory
- Nurturing Diversity
- Nurturing a Systemic Participation
- Constructing Culture
- Fostering Communication

Figure 1. A schematic representation a Theory of of Ana´s Teaching

Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of a theory of Ana´s teaching. It presents her moral self as the core of Ana´s work; this moral self determines Ana´s view of the child; classroom life is developed as a participatory democracy building; classroom life is constructed daily through a changing puzzle. From all these axes emerges a curriculum that is polycentric, constructive and phenomenological.

Ana, the Master Teacher

Ana builds, day after day, a participatory democracy in her classroom, by teaching her children how to be active members of a community of learners. For most of you, who have never lived under a dictatorship, my assertion may not have the meaning it does for me. But for those of us who lived through Portugal before the revolution, what we all call "the days when we could not speak", democracy is a fragile and a wonderful thing.

The Large Table, where Ana and her children converse, discuss, plan, and problem solve, became for me a metaphor for democracy. To build that democracy Ana masters the quotidian, the daily, the ever changing puzzle of classroom life. According to Ana, the daily common events in a classroom are "like a puzzle, the pieces have to fit together so that it works... so that we all can make ourselves clear." Juggling many roles at once, Ana constructs a flexible schedule, changes space and materials, uses "work organizers" as scaffolds, interacts with the children, creates group centered discipline, and provides a "school-home" atmosphere. The "work

organizers", part of the organizational frame of the Movimento da Escola Moderna, are charts and maps on the walls that organize classroom life, for example, the calendar, responsibilities chart, growth scale, attendance chart, wall journal.

Solving the intrincacies of the quotidian puzzle is presented as important women´s work. Ana explains: "I do well with simple life things. They are my language. Do you understand? My language is that one, I don´t have another one. That one I manage well. With that one I am perfectly at ease" (interview, June 15, 1994). Ana speaks of the language of simple life things, in Grumet´s (1988) words, about the "phenomenology of the familiar." For Ana intellectual life emerges from a caring group life. This is why Ana is a master teacher.

A view of the children. Ana views children as intelligent and capable, curious and alert (Donaldson, 1979), with a capacity for being reliable and independent. They are not perfect or idealized children. Ana is aware of many of their distorted behaviors, of their difficulties in social interaction, of their insecurities and, even, of their smallness. Yet Ana opens "avenues" for them. She believes in their tremendous capacity for learning and in going beyond their limitations.

Ana sees the children, not in isolation, but as parts of a group of other very different children. She believes that knowledge is constructed and that children construct that knowledge in negotiation and dialogue (Bruner, 1986). Knowledge is generated from social practice (Bruffee, 1986), therefore social practice needs to be cared for by the teacher. Negotiation and dialogue around the

Large Table are at the center not only of one classroom but of Ana´s teaching.

Ana works consistently in the Zone of Proximal Development of children (Vygotsky, 1978). She believes that what children can do with the support of others may be a stronger indicator of their development (intellectual, social, emotional) than what they do by themselves (Vygotsky, 1978). She believes that many people can become scaffolds for the children, not just the teacher, but peers, older children, parents and grandparents, teacher aides, etc. Many objects can scaffold the children, too. Ana´s "work organizers" demonstrate powerfully how children can work ahead of their development.

Finally, Ana sees the child deeply immersed in his context and in the culture of his times, of his country and family. Yet, as single and unique human beings, they have the capacity for transcending that context. It is from that movement of transcendence that emerges their sense of self-direction, for creation, for discovery and for making sense of the world.

Democracy Building. Ana conceives classroom life as building a participatory democracy by developing a true sense of community and interdependency. For Ana, a classroom is, in the words of Grumet (1988) "a real space in the middle" (p. 20) where transformative consciousness happens through a process of "social relations and negotiations" (p. 9).

Ana´s theory of teaching views daily life in a classroom as an opportunity for children "to learn the basic skills required to participate in public debate" (Kessler 1991, p. 94). Ana teaches young

children to become little citizens around the Large Table. They learn about respect, about negotiating conflicting points of view, about equality of opportunities and justice, about diversity, about responsibility and commitment, about their own rights and about the rights of the others. Children learn that they can be more because of the support of the community (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore Ana perceives education as a conversation (Bruner, 1986), as communication and dialogue. Democracy building, in Ana´s classroom, implies providing for children to leave school with a "sense of competence and self-respect" and with the experience of "intellectual satisfaction" (Donaldson 1979, p. 134).

The Changing Puzzle. Ana is skilled at the daily puzzle making and solving because she gives herself time to plan and reflect ahead as well as developing joint planning with the children. Everyday she goes home and writes notes about the day, as a way for making sense of the next day. In order for the puzzle to work, Ana needs to care for the interactions among children. Ana exercises control when necessary "with a light touch" (Donaldson, 1979) and she fosters productive conflict, as she perplexes the children and invites them to think on their own.

There is a structure, in Ana´s classroom, a predictable, safe structure, which is flexible, negotiated, organized and owned by the group under her guidance. But, at the same time, Ana captures the unplanned events, oversees their educational potential, and follows and studies them in depth with the children. Each day is different, each day is a variation on the theme of the quotidian.

She is a skilled juggler who has learned, day after day, not to count only on herself as a juggler. She uses other children as jugglers, she uses children´s family members as jugglers, she has used me, the researcher, as a juggler. Ana´s supreme art is to know how to juggle several jugglers so that "all the pieces fit together."

Finally, Ana has discovered the supreme art of teaching -- to be central but invisible. Ana is central in the life of her classroom because she is everywhere, attentive and available. She constructs scaffolds for the children, or helps them to construct the scaffolds they need, or helps them to build scaffolds for each other. Then, when the structure is steady and firm on its own, Ana moves away. Ana is aware that her work is never so important as when she is no longer needed. She has found the tremendous wisdom of knowing when to move from the center (Donaldson, 1979).

An Emergent Curriculum. In Ana´s classroom, there is not a pre-determined curriculum. Ana follows the educational model of the Movimento da Escola Moderna she belongs to. The curriculum emerges in a phenomenological sense, which means that "multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others" (Bogdan & Biklen 1992, p. 34), and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality. The events, the experiences, the situations flow and Ana captures them for the group. Then, systematically and rigorously, Ana pursues them using investigation and leading the group to a step by step process of inquiry.

Ten years ago, Weber (1984) introduced the idea that curriculum designers were moving into a more phenomenological position

characterized by "a vigorous philosophical stance with strong existential leanings" (p. 206) and less emphasis upon accumulated psychological knowledge. Polakow (1993) speaks of a new "existential pedagogy" (p. 160). Ana´s interviews demonstrate this existential position as she faces situations or unexpected events and captures them for the educational process. The key to choosing some events or topics over the others may lay on Ana´s knowledge about children and specifically about the children she works with. It may also lay on family or societal expectations about what preschool experiences should give to children. But, above all, Ana´s curriculum choices are determined by her "philosophical stances," by her moral self, the way she sees the world. Therefore, it is obvious that Ana will choose content lines in her emergent curriculum which are connected with social justice.

Ana´s emergent curriculum is contextualized. It works for Ana, for that group of children and parents, for Figueirinha. It is a polycentric curriculum. Because it is a "child-sensitive curriculum" (Katz, 1993), it is not just centered in the child. it is also centered in the teacher, in parents, in society´s expectations. Therefore, when a topic is studied, not only children are interested and learn from it, but also the teacher, the parents, the teacher aide, etc.

Conclusion

Let me turn at the end to the title of this paper. Out of the devastation of the times of his life in prison, Jeremiah, the prophet (Book of Jeremiah, 32), in a leap of Faith, and "by the word of the

Lord", bought a field, for him to plant the future, because "houses and fields and vineyards shall yet be bought in this land".

Despite the devastation of Portuguese educational landscape of 1993 and 1994, Ana has "bought a field" and she continues planting it. Her field is blossoming. She is out there at Figueirinha, a public preschool, and she teaches, day after day, with mastery and skill, a group of children to become young citizens in our fragile Portuguese democracy.

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